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ABSTRACT

This guide for employed parents describes types of programs available to school-age children, criteria parents can use in selecting a program that meets their child's needs, and ways to find or develop neighborhood child care programs. Options for young children include day care centers, day care in schools, family day care, and care at home. Discussion of older children's self-care includes advice on preparing children to stay alone at home and emergency back-up services. The process of selecting a child care option is discussed mainly in terms of questions focusing on evaluation of the child and his or her program, the child's ability to stay alone at home, the child's inability to cope with his or her care situation, and whether a child is troubled. Concluding discussion offers advice on what to do if appropriate care is not available. Appended are a bibliography and a resource list, as well as a checklist for school-age programs organized into four categories: the caregiver; the program; the home or center; and the parent's responsibility to the caregiver. (RH)

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SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE A GUIDE FOR WORKING PARENTS

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Dear Parents,

In January, 1984, Save The Children began Child Care Solutions, a Resource and Referral Service for parents in the metropolitan Atlanta area who needed child care. Our purpose is two-fold: to expand and improve child care through training for child care providers and community education, and to help parents make good child care choices through individual counseling and the publication of self-help material. We have developed this booklet to expand the capability of Child Care Solutions to counsel parents with school-age children.

In this publication we describe the various kinds of programs available to school-age children. We also suggest criteria parents can use to choose a program that suits their children's needs, and describe how to find or develop child care programs in a neighborhood.

This book was made possible by a grant from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Family, Washington, D.C. Patricia Divine—Hawkins, project officer. We hope it will prove useful to you.

Additional copies are available from Save The Children, 1340 Spring Street, Atlanta, Georgia 30309 at cost.

Sincerely,

Nancy Travis
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Save The Children
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WHAT DO I DO ABOUT CHILD CARE NOW THAT THEY ARE IN SCHOOL?

For years now you have been worrying about child care, where to find it, is it working, how will you pay for it? And now, with the children in school, the problem hasn't gone away. In fact, in many ways, it seems more complex. We want to help you untangle the problem.

As the child grows older, he needs more social interaction, more intellectual stimulation, and a gradual introduction to taking responsibility for himself. During the early school years a child changes both physically and mentally at a rapid rate. A program that was perfect last year may need to be changed to reflect the growing needs of the child, and a program that works well for the school year may not be right for the summer.

That means that parents must constantly reevaluate the options in the community and create a solution that satisfies their family. In this booklet we will discuss a range of options open to the parent, from care that takes full responsibility for the child to programs that help a child take full responsibility for herself. We will discuss the criteria parents might use when choosing a program for their child, as well as steps a parent can take when child care programs are in short supply in their neighborhood.

WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

School-age child care can be found in both licensed and unlicensed facilities. All day care centers must be licensed by the Department of Human Resources. A day care center is defined as an organization that takes care of more than 18 children for pay. However, some school-age care does not have to be licensed. Extended day programs offered by a public school, summer camps offered less than seven hours a day, programs offered two days a week or less, and free programs do not require licensing. A person who takes care of someone else's children at home must register with the state if she takes care of three to six children who are not her own. A registered home must adhere to certain standards of health and safety.

Because licensing only means that minimum standards are adhered to and because some programs are not required to be licensed, the responsibility for checking on the program to see if it is adequate for children's needs must fall to the parent. The appendix of this booklet contains a quick checklist to help you determine whether a program meets your needs.

Day Care Centers:

Many private day care centers, and some non-profit agencies and churches offer school-age child care, or care for both pre-school and school-age children. Programs that offer stimulating age-appropriate activities can be a positive experience for children.

Programs that are licensed with the state can usually be found in the telephone book or through a referral service like Child Care Solutions. Many of them offer transportation to and from the schools in their area.

Other programs that are solely for school-age children may or may not be licensed. It may be difficult to find out what programs are available in your area if they are not licensed. You can check with your school, with churches in your area, with the recreation department and with the local branches of the YMCA, the YWCA, Boys clubs, and Girls' Clubs to find out what organized daycare programs are available. Child Care Solutions has a list of some after school programs that don't require licensing, and is constantly seeking to identify additional programs.

Day Care in Schools

More and more interest is centered around care for school-aged children offered in the school so that children need not be transported from the school to a day care situation. Some schools administer their own programs, some are run by parent groups, and some by community agencies or day care centers. A school will often start a program if parent groups express a desire for a day care program for their children.

Family Day Care:

By law, a family day care provider is a person who takes care of not more than six children in the home besides her own. If she takes care of more than three children, she is required to be registered with the state. Many parents who choose this type of care believe that it best creates a home-like atmosphere.

Referral services such as Child Care Solutions have extensive lists of family day care providers in their area. Many providers advertise in newspapers, with churches, and on employee bulletin boards. You may find a friend or neighbor who would like to take care of children.

Care In My Home:

Many parents would choose to have someone come to their home to care for the children if they could find a reliable person and if they could afford it. The child has a chance to play with her neighborhood friends and to carry on her normal routine at home. Some parents find a teenager, college student, or senior citizen willing to work the part-time hours. This gives the child a chance to interact with an adult with interesting hobbies or skills.

Recreational, Community and Church Resources

There are many programs offered throughout the community that give school-age children a chance to meet new groups of people and learn new skills. Such activities break up the monotony of staying at home every day after school and provide the child with a chance to get out into the community for new experiences. However, these programs normally do not take responsibility for the child staying at the site, usually meet for a limited time once or twice a week and offer no transportation. If a child is ready to take responsibility for attendance, and transportation can be worked out, these programs may offer a valuable growth experience.

Transportation in areas without public transportation is often the biggest difficulty for families wanting to use community facilities. Here are some possible solutions: Sometimes the school bus will route one bus to a school-age program. Ask your school district what their policy is, and if they could possibly help you. Sometimes a working parent can make arrangements with

a teenager to pay them for taking their children to a lesson, or have their child included in a car pool where they make a cash contribution in lieu of driving. In some areas, the parent may find that recreation, community, or church groups have programs that almost approximate child care, with van service from neighborhood schools and programs every day of the week.

Where Can I Find Out About These Programs?

City or County recreation centers, YMCA's, YWCA's, Boys' Clubs and Girls' Clubs, your local churches, and community schools often offer programs. Programs are often advertised in the local newspaper or through flyers distributed through the library or the elementary schools.

Self Care

At some point, parents and child will probably decide that the child is ready to stay home alone. If the family prepares for this experience adequately, it can be a satisfactory plan.

The child who stays alone is being asked to assume many of the responsibilities of an adult. Whether he can handle these responsibilities depends upon many things: how safe the neighborhood is, how well he can follow safety rules, if there is a person in the neighborhood to go to in an emergency, etc. A child asked to take too much responsibility too early may experience fears, loneliness, and resentment.

When the choice has been made to have the child take care of herself after school, mental health experts suggest that parents find some way to break up the week so that the children do not have to stay home alone every day. Social interaction with other children is very important at this age. A parent might arrange for an activity at a community center one or two days a week, or for care at a friend's house. If the work schedule will allow, a parent could come home early one day a week to do something special with the child.

How Can I Prepare My Child To Stay Alone At Home?

When a child and his parents feel that he is ready to take care of himself, there are several things that can be done to make the transition easier.

1. Parents can sit down and discuss duties and emergency procedures. The child should know exactly what is expected of him and what he can expect from his parents.
2. Parents can train the child with short periods at home once or twice a week, giving him set tasks or responsibilities to carry out, and then evaluating the experience with the child afterward.
3. The transition to self-care can be gradual. The family may move the child from a day care center or babysitter situation to care four times a week, with a lesson at the community center and a short stay at home alone one day. As the child gains confidence, the time a child stays alone can be increased.

There are several books and courses that offer training for parents and children. You will find some of them listed in the bibliography.

Emergency Back-up Services

A family can also enlist the help of a back-up system for the child to use in case of an emergency. A few public agencies and daycare centers offer a telephone service for children coming home alone after school. The child calls the service to check in and say she is at home. In some services, the adult discusses plans for the afternoon and is available to help the child handle emergencies or just to be there if she is lonely or afraid. Other hotlines are used only for emergencies. However, experts point out that a voice on the telephone is not a substitute for face to face communication. Such a service should be used only when parent and child determine that the child is ready to move to the responsibility of caring for herself.

A family may find a neighbor, block parent, or a day care center that is willing to act as an emergency back-up for a small fee. This arrangement has the advantage of allowing the child to go to a safe place in the neighborhood if he feels threatened or lonely.

HOW CAN I DECIDE WHAT TYPE OF CARE TO USE?

Any decision must be tempered with practical considerations. How much can the family afford for child care? What sort of care is available in the area? How long would the child have to stay alone if he comes home alone after school? What are transportation possibilities for the programs chosen?

But aside from practical considerations, the most important element of the decision is the benefit of the program to a child's development. Children may not consistently make progress in their ability to take responsibility for herself. A child of 12 may be able to take care of herself at home, accomplish her chores, and do her schoolwork. Next year at 13 it may all fall apart, and she will need to be in a supervised program of some sort. Parents have to constantly evaluate their choices for child care based on the child's development level at the time.

Evaluating Your Child and His Program

Here are some questions about your child that you can ask:

1. Does my child do better in a large or small group?
2. Would he benefit more from a structured learning program or a more flexible play time?
3. Does she express an interest in learning a particular skill?

If you decide your child would benefit from a structured program, here are some questions about the program that you could ask:

1. What programs are available and accessible in my area? (There may not be the choice you would like.)
2. Is the program flexible in what it requires children to do, and are a stimulating mix of activities available?

3. Does the program contain many of the elements of good programming contained in the Check-list For School-age Programs at the back of the book?
4. Do my child and I *like* the caregiver?
5. Will there be some other children in the program in my child's age group?

If you think your child might be ready to stay home alone, here are some questions to help you determine that.

1. Does my child want to be at home on her own after school?
2. Does he follow directions well on his own?
3. Can she carry out a series of assigned tasks on her own without being reminded?
4. Does he use good judgement?
5. Does she talk about her problems with me?
6. Are there back-up systems I can use to help him in an emergency?

How can I tell when my child is not coping well with our choice for her.

Regular communication with the caregiver and the child about how the program is working is exceedingly important. Establish a regular schedule of meetings with the caregiver to talk about your child's progress. Encourage the caregiver to bring concerns to you. If you are concerned about anything, discuss it with the caregiver immediately.

Discussing your child's feelings about her arrangement may sometimes be difficult. Ideally, parents and children have such a close relationship that a child will confide her fears to her parents. But often, particularly when a child realizes that there are problems with finding another solution, she will decide to "tough it out" rather than cause trouble for her parents.

You can help your child by assuring him that you are open to his feelings about staying alone, or being in day care, and that you want to discuss any problems with him and help if you can.

Some Ways Parents Can Tell a Child Is Troubled:

1. Is his school-work slipping?
2. Is she gaining weight rapidly? (Children who are depressed may tend to overeat.)
3. Does he seem listless, uninterested in playing with other children?
4. Does she have trouble sleeping?

WHAT CAN I DO IF THE RIGHT CHILD CARE IS NOT AVAILABLE

Check On Available Resources

Have you already:

1. checked with the local high schools and colleges and senior citizen centers for someone who might want to come to your house to babysit?
2. checked with your co-workers to see what they are doing for their children after school?
3. checked with parents at your child's school to see if they might help with babysitting or with transportation to recreation programs?
4. checked with the youth organizations and churches in the neighborhood to see if they are offering after school care?
5. called Child Care Solutions?
6. put up notices requesting care at your school, church, library, grocery store, or employee bulletin board?

If You Still Can't Find Child Care

If you find that your community is not offering enough programs for school-age children and you want to get involved in improving that situation, there are many things you can do.

1. Some schools offer after-school programs in the school. With the support of a group of parents, your principal might be willing to start such a program. Ask whether the school has considered after-school care and how you can help develop a plan. We have information on how you can get started, and we'll be happy to help.
2. Many churches offer after-school programs once or twice a week. Can you get several churches to form a consortium to fund and run a program?
3. Some companies help fund after-school programs. You could encourage your employer to help subsidize programs.
4. Talk to the civic groups that offer recreation programs after school to encourage them to work out transportation networks. Sometimes it would be very helpful to the working parent if the hours the recreation building was open were lengthened.
5. Get your PTA or employee newsletter to start a special exchange for those who want to offer child care and those who are seeking it.

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Reading Material

School's Out — Now What?

Choices For Your Child's Time

Joan M. Bergstrom, Ed. D.

1984 Ten Speed Press

P.O. Box 7123

Berkley, Calif. 94707

Half a Childhood

Time for School-age Child Care

Bender, Eldr & Flatter

School-age Notes

P.O. Box 120674

Nashville, TN 37212

In Charge

A Complete Handbook for Kids with Working Parents

Kathy Kyte

1983 Alfred A. Knopf

New York, NY

KIDS

Kids Independence Development System

A Self-Reliance Program

Atlanta Council of Campfire, Inc.

Suite 528

100 Edgewood Ave.

Atlanta, GA 30303

A Parent Guide

How to Help Your Child Learn Self-Care

Helen Swan and Victoria Melcher Houston

1983 Kansas Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse

Organizations that will train community volunteers to give courses to parents and children about self-reliance:

Georgia Council on Child Abuse

250 Georgia Ave.

Atlanta, GA 30312

(404) 688-5081

Campfire Council

100 Edgewood Ave.

Atlanta, GA 30303

Referral Service:

Save the Children

Child Care Solutions

1340 Spring St.

Suite 200

Atlanta, GA 30309

(404) 885-1585 - 9:00-3:00 - Monday-Friday

A CHECK LIST FOR SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS

Here are some things to think about when you are choosing a program for your child. You may want to make notes in the margins as you are interviewing different programs.

The Caregiver.

- Is warm, friendly, and supportive
- Treats each child as a special person
- Has training and experience working with school-age children
- Respects and accepts different cultural values
- Listens to children, talks with them, and takes their suggestions into account when planning the program.

- Sets clear limits and expectations
- Encourages self-discipline
- Encourages children to express themselves
- Encourages self-help and independence
- Helps angry or fearful children work out their feelings
- Encourages children to develop talents and feel good about themselves.
- Reduces natural conflicts and problems of children

- Encourages parent participation
- Provides information about your children
- Provides time for parent conferences
- Uses community resources
- Checks attendance and follows up with parents

The Program

Time is given:

- to practice skills
- for homework
- to just be with friends
- to use community facilities
- to be alone
- for both active and quiet play
- for snacks and/or meals
- to pursue sports and hobbies
- for trips, excursions, and other special activities

The program allows your child:

- to choose his activities
- to help develop his program
- to gradually assume responsibility for himself
- to express his ideas and opinions

The Home or Center

is pleasant, clean and comfortable
has space for active and quiet play
has enough heat, light, and ventilation
has an outdoor play area
is a place I'd like my child to be
has poisons, sharp objects stored away
is free of hazards
has a first aid kit available
keeps equipment safe and in good repair
has emergency numbers posted
encourages good health habits
has a plan to handle emergencies posted
has clay, paint, books, records, games, and films at appropriate age levels
has outdoor play equipment
has musical instruments

Your Responsibility to the caregiver:

Tell the caregiver about your child's special needs, fears and physical problems
Leave phone numbers where you or another can be reached
Drop in now and then
Arrange for regular conferences
Ask questions when you have concerns